

## FAMILY FOCUS

# Barriers to Interpersonal Communication

Extension Family Life Specialists  
The Texas A&M University System

**I**nterpersonal communication is the communication that takes place between people. It is made up of both verbal and nonverbal elements. Verbal communication is the actual words we say. Nonverbal communication includes the gestures, facial expressions, tones of voice, and actions that often reveal more about our feelings than the words we say.

Often, barriers to communication are the result of personal attitudes or habits that we can change. Here are some common ones. Which ones sometimes keep you from being able to communicate clearly and constructively with others? Can you eliminate some of these barriers?

1. *Background and experience.* Each person is different and has had experiences that give him or her a unique way of looking at the world. Each person learns, understands, feels and speaks according to his or her own background of experiences. People sometimes have trouble communicating because of differences in age, experience or background. We can eliminate this barrier by realizing that we can learn valuable lessons from people whose experiences are different from our own.
2. *Health and physical condition.* A person's health may prevent him from thinking clearly, listening carefully, or speaking well. Pain, fatigue, nervousness, or weakness are obvious barriers to communication. A person who is ill may need extra consideration from others.
3. *Feelings and emotions.* Emotions are powerful forces that can affect how clearly we express ourselves. We think, act and speak differently when we feel cool, calm or affectionate than when we feel angry, excited or fearful. Don't let emotions get in the way of clear communication. Wait until strong emotions have passed—then listen and speak.



***Each person has a different background and experience.***

4. *Word choice.* Words often have more than one meaning. Sometimes people choose the wrong words for what they want to say. If you are speaking and sense that the other person doesn't understand, you might need to clarify the words you are using. If you don't understand someone else's word choice, ask him to explain what he means a different way.
5. *Listening only for words.* When we hear only the words, we miss the feelings behind them. "I don't care" may mean unhappiness, boredom, fear, lack of confidence, or hurt feelings. The message comes not just from the words, but also from the way they are said. Be sensitive to nonverbal communication.

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